Walking in the European City: Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography, Timothy Shortell and Evrick Brown (Editors), Ashgate, 2014, 297 pages, ISBN: 9781472416162, £70 (hardback)

Walking is a healthy and environmentally sustainable type of mobility, so promoting walking is generally considered as good for society. But how does society influences walking? And what does walking tell us about society? "Walking in the European City" answers these questions, presenting walking as a way to understand and interact with the city, both for urban dwellers and for researchers.

Walking is a social activity because it reflects social norms and individual values and shapes people's perceptions of places and of other people. The concept of walkability (the quality of pedestrian environment) has been object of increased attention in recent years, but it captures only the "hardware" of mobility. The present volume looks at the "software" dimension, related to people's perceptions of walking (p.41). This perspective fits well with the contemporary thought on "mobilities", which emphasize the social and cultural aspects of mobility. It also reflects the increased interest of social science on individuals and interactions at a small scale.

Walking can also be used as a method to study places and people. The *flâneur*, a label applied to 19th century French writers such as Baudelaire and Balzac, tried to understand the city by walking and critically observing other people's behaviour. In the 1960s, the Situationists used a similar practice called *dérive*, in which they roamed the city or followed the crowds in order to identify pushes and pulls in urban space. Their reflections on how the built environment influences walking were then used as a critique of consumer capitalism. The advantage of these methods is that walking is slow enough to capture rich information, including sights, sounds and odours. The presence of the researcher in the space studied, and the interaction with people also allows for a critical reflection about that space. The effort of walking itself can also influence the researchers' state of mind, helping to suspend judgement (p.134).

Previous work has dealt mainly with global cities, especially Paris (hence the French terminology) and London (fruit of the involvement of famous writers such as Will Self). The present volume has a refreshingly wide scope, with 14 chapters by different authors, offering insights on urban walking in the UK, France, Italy, Greece, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Turkey and Bosnia.

This wide scope allows for an assessment of issues that are common to many European cities. One of these issues is the transformation of space linked to urban renewal and gentrification. The books of Ian Sinclair have drawn attention to the experiences of the individuals living in regenerated areas in London. In the most fascinating chapter in the present volume, Helena Holgersson advances this type of work by walking along people professionally involved in regeneration schemes. She argues that if the interviews were conducted in their offices, the answers would focus on the future and would be supported by maps and models, but while walking in the regeneration sites, the signs of the lost social environment cannot be ignored.

The effects of globalisation are another theme relevant to many European cities. People's mobility and the relationships between this mobility and the built and social environment are influenced by global flows of people and goods. Two chapters deal with these issues by looking at how migrants and ethnic minorities use public space as embodiment of a community. In another chapter, a researcher in a foreign country reflects on how her own walking habits and behaviour change as she spends more time in the city.

Walking produces information that is rich in detail but hard to extrapolate, a fact that is acknowledged throughout the book. Pedestrian culture must not be generalised as it depends on local factors (p.55), while walking methods produce "descriptions" rather than "results" (p.151) and provide experiences that are difficult to transmit to others (p.184). On the other hand, the information obtained can be used alongside other data to formulate hypotheses to test with more objective methods. For example, Chapter 2 suggests that narratives can be integrated in a geographic information system (GIS) with other geo-referenced quantitative and qualitative information. However, no chapter in this book attempts this method.

The usefulness of walking-based research is more evident when the object of analysis is a large urban area. In these cases, maps and satellite images rely on highly aggregated data and only allow for the identification of visual patterns from a large distance. As an alternative, Chapter 8 proposes "big urban walks" crossing whole metropolitan areas. This method produces information that while subjective, it is also coherent and systematic, and can be used to understand the complex social and physical factors behind the patterns observed in maps.

The contents of most of the chapters are on the border between science, journalism and literature. The authors seem comfortable being on this border, calling themselves "scientific

flâneur" (p.161) or "researcher and artivist" (p.xiv). Some of methods they use are also borrowed from experimental writing. For example, Chapter 13 uses "colour walking" (to notice everything that is of a specific colour along the walk), a method described by William Burroughs [Burroughs 1985], whose influence is not acknowledged in this chapter. The problem is that, unlike writers, the authors of this book do want to make some sort of scientific statement. As a consequence, most chapters are roughly split into a first half reviewing concepts and a second half describing walking trips. This second half often reads like a simple travelogue, despite the efforts of the authors to justify the uniqueness of their methods in the first half, using jargon such as "ethno-situationism", "modified *dérive*", and "peripatetic movement". More importantly, in many cases, there is no clear statement at the end of what the chapter achieved.

One can also argue that some of the reflections are not really the product of walking but simply of the observation of one or two places. In addition, the contents of some chapters are tangential to the subject of the book, including one on social interactions in public transport and another on the effects of the Greek economic crisis on residents' perception of their city. At same time, important issues that are mentioned in the introduction are not fully developed. A chapter on gender is clearly missing, as men's and women's mobilities are different. There is a reason why all the 19th century famous *flâneurs* were men.

Overall, the book presents concepts and methods that appeal to sociologists, anthropologists and geographers. It also gives useful ideas on how to use walking as an educational experience (p.31). It is harder to see how the book can appeal to urban planners, as the policy implications of this type of research are not made clear, with the sole exception being Chapter 3 about pedestrian culture in Denmark. Nevertheless, the book provides interesting insights on urban mobility and on the connections between the role of walking in society and in social science.

Paulo Rui Anciaes

University College London

References

Burroughs, W. (1985) Ten years and a billion dollars, in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays*, Arcade Publishing, New York.